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ABSTRACT

Physical impediments are not the only possible obstacles for handicapped students; they also must deal with the attitudes of their fellow students. To assess the attitudes of college students toward physically disabled students, 224 undergraduates completed the Situational Attitude Scale-Handicapped (SAS-H). Results showed that, in general, students had negative attitudes toward people who were blind or in wheelchairs in situations where close personal contact was required, such as dating or marriage, but were more neutral or positive in less intimate situations such as employment or receiving help in a library. Students were more comfortable having close personal contact with students in a wheelchair than with blind students in academic situations, such as receiving help with classwork. The findings suggest that prejudice toward and stereotypes of disabled persons can be reduced by recognizing that potential differences in reactions by situation and disability exist. (Author/JAC)

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ATTITUDES OF MALE AND FEMALE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TOWARD STUDENTS WITH DIFFERENT PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

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Research Report # 10-81

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With the physically disabled student now being mainstreamed into colleges and universities, emphasis is being placed on the physical accessability of classrooms, dormitories, lavratories, etc. However, the physical impediments are not the only possible obstacles for these students. They must also interact with other students.

A review of the literature shows there is a paucity of published data on attitudes toward the disabled. The data that are available, however, indicate several consistent findings. First, despite the fact that a negative evaluation regarding a person who is disabled can possibly spread to affect the non-impaired characteristics of the person as well (Wright, 1964), evidence suggests that there is no universal stereotype of the physically disabled (McDaniel, 1969; Whiteman and Lukoff, 1965). Although college students rate blindness as more serious and anxiety provoking compared to other handicaps, a distinction was found between attitudes toward blindness vs. attitudes toward blind people, a finding that has led Whiteman and Lukoff (1965) to conclude that negative attitudes and evaluations may be related to the condition of the disability.

Other findings indicate that there is a relationship between negative attitudes toward the physically disabled and negative attitudes toward ethnic and religious minorities. Yuker (1965) found that individuals who were prejudiced toward the disabled utilized a rigid categorization schema, parallel to one used by individuals who were prejudiced toward minority groups, by describing the disabled as "all alike." Chesler (1965), who collected data on college students, found a correlation between ethnocentric attitudes toward "out groups" and a negative attitude toward the disabled.

Finally, it has been found that social distance affects attitudes toward the disabled. For example, Yuker (1965) established that a positive attitude toward

the physically disabled was related to the level and degree of previous contact with individuals who were disabled. The more experience and contact, the less likely a person was to express a negative attitude. Siller's (1964) work also emphasizes the importance of social distance. When high school and college students were polled about their willingness to interact with a disabled person, only 9% were willing to have someone disabled as a spouse. The students did not report feelings of aversion toward the disabled. Rather, they were concerned with dependency needs and the day-to-day physical necessities of a disabled spouse. The students also expressed a reluctance to have limits placed on sharing recreational activites with a spouse, as well as a fear that they would be stigmatized by society.

Despite the evidence of some negative attitudes toward the disabled, some studies have indicated findings whereby students have consistently evaluated the physically handicapped more favorably than the non-handicapped (Carver et al., 1978). Although these findings at first might appear to be unexpected, they parallelled results from studies that have been done on attitudes toward blacks and women (Rokeach, Smith & Evans, 1960; Sellnitz, Edrich & Cook, 1965; Sedlacek and Brooks, 1971). Such findings have prompted researchers to suggest that subjects, when aware of what attitudes are being measured, answer questions in ways which they perceive as being socially desirable; how they "should" answer as opposed to how they actually feel (Sedlacek and Brooks, 1971).

While researchers have consistently found differences by sex in attitudes toward race and sex, differential reactions by sex to different physical disabilities do not seem to have been systematically studied, particularly among college students.

The present study was designed to measure the attitudes of male and female university students toward blind and other physically disabled students. To control for possible social desirability factors, a format was used which has been previously successful in measuring the attitudes of whites toward blacks and women (Sedlacek and Brooks, 1970; 1972).

To measure attitudes where students were unaware of the purpose of the study, and hence were unable to withdraw or ignore the variable studied (race or sex), Sedlacek and Brooks developed the Situational Attitude Scale (SAS). The SAS is composed of 10 personal and social situations. Each situation, which represents an instance where race/sex might be important in an individual's reaction to the situation, contains 10 bipolar semantic differential scales.

Two forms are used for the administration of the SAS. Each of the two forms, A and B, are identical except the word "black" (or woman) was inserted into each situation in form B. Both forms are administered to a group and differences in mean responses on the bipolar scales for each situation are attributed to the racial attitudes of the group. For this study, a version of the SAS was used to measure student attitudes toward the handicapped: the Situational Attitude Scale - Handicapped (SAS-H).

METHOD

Subjects

244 undergraduates (118 male and 126 female) completed the SAS-H during a summer orientation session for new and transfer students at the University of Maryland, College Park, campus.

Procedures

Three forms, A. B. and C, of the SAS-H were administered randomly to groups of students over a three-day period. All three forms were identical except that situations in Form A did not specify a disability, while the word "blind" was specified in Form B, and "wheel chair" was specified in Form C (Exhibit 1). All three forms of the SAS-H consisted of ten situations, and for each of the situations, students were asked to respond to ten bipolar semantic differential scales, making a total

of 100 items. Situations were developed from the literature and pilot studies suggesting situations where students who were not physically disabled might have negative reactions to students who were.

Data were analyzed by analysis of variance (Form x Sex), using Student Newman Keu post hoc tests at the .05 level.

RESULTS

Overall Attitudes and Discussion

Differences in attitudes toward both Form B (blind) and Form C (wheelchair) compared to Form A (neutral) occurred in 39 out of 100 items. Since only nine items would be expected due to chance (Sakoda, Cohen & Beall, 1954), overall form differences can be said to be significant.

Students had negative attitudes toward people who were blind or in wheelchairs for those situations in which close, personal contact was required. For example, for Situations III (sister asked to marry), and VIII (asked out on date), students described these situations as sad, angered, afraid, bad and hopeless. On the other hand, for those situations in which students were not forced into close contact, fewer form differences were found. In fact, the words that students used to describe Situation II (another student accepted to a university and you are not), Situation V (another student hired), and Situation VI (student insists on receiving help), were basically positive: affection, good, not sorry, not mad, fine, friendly, and fair. These findings support the research done by Siller (1964) on the importance of social distance in the measurement of attitudes toward the disabled. As such, a typical student from this study might feel: "disabled people are O.K. with me as long as I don't have to be close to them."

Blind vs. Wheelchair

Students had different attitudes toward blind people (Form B) and those in wheelchairs (Form C) on 17 items; again, more than the 9 expected by chance. Attitudes toward

blind students were more negative in three situations. In Situation I (student seated next to you) students felt more nervous and "no smile " toward blind students than those in a wheelchair; in Situation II (student accepted to a university) they felt "bad" and "sorry" toward blind students, and they felt worse about a blind student offering help with an assignment (Situation VII) than they did about help from a student in a wheelchair.

Situations where student preferred a blind person to one in a wheelchair were III (sister asked to marry) , where they felt not mad and no bother toward a blind person; Situation VI (student insists on receving help) where they felt friendly and good; asked out on a date (Situation VIII) where they felt no surprise, happy, good, understanding and "friend ;" Situation IX (mysterious experiences) where they felt "no trouble;" and Situation X (meet person at party) where they felt good and not mad toward a blind person compared to someone in a wheelchair.

It appears that students are more comfortable in having close personal contact with blind students than with those in wheelchairs. The situations where a student in a wheelchair is preferred include receiving help with an academic assignment, which is a common one encountered by many students.

Sex Differences

Women responded differently than men on 46 items. On nearly all those items women were more positive about the situation, regardless of whether it involved blind students or those in wheelchairs. Women were positive in Situation I (student seated next to you), Situation II (sister asked to marry), Situation IV (new roommate), Situation V another student hired), Situation VI (student insists on receiving help, and Situation X (person you meet at a party). The only situation where women felt more negative is where someone confessed having mysterious psychic experiences. (Situation IX), where women felt more unsafe than men. There was only one situation where there was an interaction between sex and form, and hence it was

assumed to have occurred by chance.

Implications and Recommendations

The climate that the physically disabled student will enter appears to be based on the nature of his/her disability, the situation they are facing at the moment, and the sex of the non-disabled student reacting to them. Generally, physically disabled students can be expected to find difficulty in forming close associations with non-disabled students, particularly with male non-disabled students. Blind students have a better chance of establishing social relations with other students, but blind students can be expected to have more trouble in forming academically based relationships such as study groups, lab partners, etc.

Amir (1969), in his summary of the work on interpersonal contact, concludes that contact by itself is not a sufficient condition to reduce prejudice. He feels that contact under positive circumstances, where each person perceives that there is something to gain in the relationship, is required or contact actually may increase prejudice.

Several implications for student and staff programming seem apparent. First, orientation programs for students in general should include information on physically disabled students and their unique problems in adjusting to the campus and what non-disabled students could do about it. Differences by disability, sex, and situation should be presented and discussed. Sedlacek and Brooks (1976) have recommended a six stage process for eliminating prejudice which can be implemented in a workshop format. The stages include looking at differences positively, understanding prejudice, assessing attitudes, looking at examples of institutional prejudice, and generating goals and strategies for change. The instrument presented in this study could be useful in such workshops.

Disabled student services offices could also make use of the information from the study in preparing their students for what they could expect to encounter in various institu-

tions. The range of prior experience that physically disabled students have had with a variety of situations probably varies considerably in most disabled student populations.

The results of this study should also prove useful to those providing student services in many areas, including counseling, advising, career development, student activities, etc. By recognizing that there may be prejudice and stereotypes of physically disabled people, and that there are potential differences in reactions by situation and disability, the chances of providing better service and reducing prejudice toward physically disabled students could be greatly increased.

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EXHIBIT I.
INSTRUCTIONS AND SITUATIONS FROM THE SAS-H*

INSTRUCTIONS

This questionnaire measures how people think and feel about a number of social and personal incidents and situations. It is not a test so there are no right or wrong answers. The questionnaire is anonymous, so please do NOT SIGN YOUR NAME.

Each situation or item is followed by 10 descriptive word scales. Your task is to select, for each descriptive scale, the rating which best describes YOUR feelings toward the item.

Sample item: Going on a date.

Happy	A	B	C	D	E	Sad

You would indicate the direction and extent of your feelings (e.g., you might select B) by indicating your choice (B) on your response sheet by blackening in the appropriate word space for that word scale. DO NOT MARK ON THE BOOKLET. PLEASE RESPOND TO ALL WORD SCALES.

Sometimes you will feel as though you had the same item before on the questionnaire. This will not be the case, so DO NOT LOOK BACK AND FORTH through the items. Do not try to rmember how you checked similar items earlier in the questionnaire. MAKE EACH ITEM A SEPARATE AND INDEPENDENT JUDGMENT. Respond as honestly as possible without puzzling over individual items. Respond with your first impression wherever possible.

SITUATIONS

	FORM A	FORM B	FORM C
I	A new student is seated next to you in class.	A blind student is seated next to you in class.	A student who is confined to a wheelchair is seated next to you in class.
II	You learn that another student is accepted to a university and you are not.	You learn that a blind student is accepted to a university and you are not.	You learn that a student who is confined to a wheelchair is accepted to a university and you are not.
III	A man asks your sister to marry him.	A blind man asks your sister to marry him.	A man who is confined to a wheelchair asks your sister to marry him.
IV	You learn that you have a new roommate.	You learn that you have a new roommate who is blind.	You learn that you have a new roommate who is confined to a

SITUATIONS, Continued

FORM A	FORM B	FORM C
V Another student is hired as a student aid in a campus office instead of you.	A blind student is hired as a student aid in a campus office instead of you.	A student who is confined to a wheelchair is hired as a student aid instead of you.
VI A student insists on receiving your help in getting a book from the library.	A blind student insists on receiving your help in getting a book from the library.	A student who is confined to a wheelchair insists on receiving your help in getting a book from the library.
VII In one of your classes, a student offers to help you with an assignment that you are having difficulty with.	In one of your classes, a blind student offers to help you with an assignment that you are having difficulty with.	In one of your classes, a student who is confined to a wheelchair offers to help you with an assignment that you are having difficulty with.
VIII You are asked out on a date.	You are asked out on a date by a blind person.	You are asked out on a date by a person who is confined to a wheelchair.
IX You meet a person who tells you about having "mysterious, psychic experiences."	You meet a blind person who tells you about having "mysterious, psychic experiences."	You meet a person who is confined to a wheelchair who tells you about having "mysterious, psychic experiences."
X A person you meet at a party talks to you about being "different from most people, and in some ways, gifted."	A blind person you meet at a party talks to you about being "different from most people, and in some ways, gifted."	A person you meet at a party who is confined to a wheelchair talks to you about being "different from most people, and in some ways, gifted."

*A copy of the complete scale is available from Dr. William Sedlacek, Counseling Center, University of Marylan,d College Park, Md. 20742, at no charge.